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No. 75

ANNOUNCEMENT BY
THE HONORABLE CYRUS R. VANCE
SECRETARY OF STATE
ON SALE OF AIRCRAFT
TO MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES
FEBRUARY 14, 1978

Consistent with our policy that arms transfers will be used to promote our national security and that of our close friends I have recommended to the President and he has approved sales of certain aircraft to Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, subject to the usual Congressional review. Next week we will begin the official process of informing and consulting with the Congress. The formal notifications will not be submitted until after the Easter recess in order to give Congress an opportunity to review fully the proposed sales. These sales will be undertaken over a period of several years. Deciding to make the sales was a very complex decision, and I want to share our views on this matter with the American people.

Any new aircraft sales to this region must be seen in the context of both the negotiating process and our objective of a peace settlement. We have considered carefully this aspect of the matter and concluded that our interests in Middle East peace and security will be best served if we go forward with some part of the aircraft sales requested by these countries.

Our commitment to Israel's security has been and remains firm. Israel must have full confidence in its ability to assure its own defense. In particular, this means Israel must be able to plan for the continued modernization of its air force. The President's decision gives particular emphasis to these points.

Egypt, too, must have reasonable assurance of its ability to defend itself if it is to continue the peace negotiations with confidence. When President Sadat made his decision several years ago to follow a course in foreign affairs that involved a change in his country's relations with the Soviet Union, he lost his major source of military equipment. This was particularly the case in Egyptian defensive aircraft capability. We believe we have a basic interest in responding to Egypt's legitimate needs.

For further information contact:

Saudi Arabia is of immense importance in promoting a course of moderation in the Middle East -- with respect to peacemaking and other regional initiatives -- and more broadly in world affairs, as in petroleum and financial policy. The Saudi Government has a legitimate requirement to modernize its very limited air defenses. For several years, we and they have recognized the need to modernize their air force with an advanced interceptor. They have asked for a limited number of F-15s, the first of which would not be delivered for several years. We believe their request is reasonable and in our interest to fulfill.

We have concluded, therefore, that the sales of these aircraft to the countries in question will help to meet their legitimate security requirements, will not alter the basic military balance in the region, and will be consistent with the overriding objective of a just and lasting peace.

Accordingly, the Administration plans to notify Congress of our intent to make the following sales:

-- For Israel, 15 F-15s in addition to the 25 previously sold, and 75 F-16s.

-- For Egypt, 50 F-5s.

-- For Saudi Arabia, 60 F-15s.

We will be signing contracts for these aircraft over the next several years. These sales will be consistent with the President's global arms transfer policy and will be within the dollar volume ceiling that he has established. The details will be reported to Congress when the statutory notifications are provided.

All of these sales are directly supportive of our overall objectives in the Middle East. Members of the Administration will be testifying before a number of Congressional committees in support of this package so that Congress will have full opportunity to make its judgment during the period of its review.

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